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SHORTGRASS COUNTRY by Monte Noelke

The small hold-over tap at the house is the only place being fed on schedule. January and most of February was too wet and muddy to make regular feed runs. No records were kept, but we probably averaged feeding about once a week.

Young cattle needed feeding so desperately that we put out a free choice molasses and mineral recipe in two pastures. Before the tubs containing the mixture had stopped rocking from the fall off the pickup tailgate, these black beggars had poked their heads in them so deep, they were in danger of drowning or choking to death.

We had to watch out that the ambrosia didn't come off on our boot soles or build up underneath our fingernails. I learned a long time ago, working in at the barber shop at Mertzon, to be careful about being between cattle and their feed. Late one evening after the barber had peeled about 40 heads of hair saturated with cottonseed meal, I swept the clippings out the back door and caused the old milk cow tied behind the drug store to be the first beast to put a premium on human hair since Indian times.

But to return to the present in a few more days a small herd of Spanish goats and a bigger herd of sheep were rolling the tubs around like a rodeo clown's act, except at

three or four bucks a roll it'd have been easier to laugh from a box seat at the coliseum.

The next problem was settling on the cash deposit on the tubs. I had 16 tubs left over from a previous supplier. Though mine were deeper than this salesman's tubs, I offered to trade even and throw in four big flower pots from a plant nursery.

He all but refused to discuss my offer. Anheuser Busch is the largest brewery in the Americas, and Budweiser salesmen don't go around turning down Schiltz bottles. Like I told him, to be big, you have to think big; it's the motto of the winner's circle.

Lots of deep, four-stomached bawling is going on up and down the fencelines. Spring promises to be a glorious adventure. I'm thinking of bringing the old tubs back on the market planted in gladioli bulbs.